

Timing Isn't Always Everything

by barsonaddict

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Summary: It's surreal for Olivia to think that 18 hours before, she was lying in the exact spot she is now, blissfully ignorant of what would happen that day.

Timing Isn't Always Everything

Set after Townhouse Incident (17x11), established Barson.

This proposal was _originally part of an alternate ending to another story of mine (Soy Tuyo) that is also set post-17x11. I reworked it into a full story to fulfill mrschiltoncat 's request for the proposal from 'The Ceremony'. While this isn't exactly a prequel, it should fit. At the very least it's a Barson proposal. Enjoy!_

* * *

><p>It's surreal for Olivia to think that 18 hours before, she was lying in the exact spot she is now, blissfully ignorant of what would happen that day.<p>

When she woke that morning, it was to the teasing kisses of her boyfriend and the strong aroma of freshly brewed coffee.

Now, as she nuzzles into his neck, placing her own teasing kisses, she thinks back to the events of earlier in the day.

They had kissed, touched, and shared laughs while getting ready for the day, and Barba was out the door well before Lucy was due to arrive. He needed go across town to his apartment before the DNA conference they were to attend on behalf of Manhattan SVU.

Flashes of the events at the townhouse go through her mind, culminating outside with a sniper's bullet being too close for comfort.

Then came the hospital: tests, scans and statements. Finally she was able to go home, where she found Rafael and Noah waiting for her. This was something good, something she always wanted, something she was afraid would slip through her fingers.

Olivia found comfort in the evening routine with her son: dinner, bath, story, bed. With Noah off in dreamland, the adults collapsed into the couch, able to fully appreciate the fact that she got out of that townhouse alive and relatively unscathed- both keenly aware of how much worse it could have been.

Wrapped in each other's arms, they shared their experiences from the hectic day; sometimes crying, sometimes wincing, sometimes squeezing a little extra hard.

Rafael shared his biggest concern after her well being: what would happen to Noah if she was killed?

She recalls the conversation that followed; she had explained that currently, Nick was listed as Noah's guardian should something happen to her. She had Trevor Langan draw up the paperwork at the same time as the adoption, before they were together. She pointed out that they still weren't even living together, and while she didn't doubt he loved her and Noah, they hadn't discussed it... yet.

His response would end up being the most significant event of the day.

flashback to earlier in the evening

Rafael breathed in deeply, trying to gather his thoughts. "I know we've only been together barely six months. But we've been close a lot longer than that. I love you, Olivia. I don't know if you grasp what that means for me to say that, so I'm going to spell it out for you. I love you: you're the only one I've said that to in over twenty years. You're the only one who makes me feel like there are good things in the world to fight for. You're the only one I've ever wanted a future with and actually been able to picture us at 85, squabbling about nothing and everything. That future includes Noah. He's a big part of you, and even if you didn't intend for him to be he's also a big part of me."

He pauses, squeezing her hand and searching her eyes, hoping he's getting his feelings out accurately.

"When I got here tonight, Noah was playing trucks with Lucy. He heard the door click and called out for you. When I answered instead, I thought he'd be upset I wasn't you. But he was happy. Maybe not as happy as if it had actually been you- but, still. Happy. To see me. I got a running hug and a sloppy kiss and then immediately I was the one he wanted to play with. It felt so right."

He pauses again, looking down at the floor and shaking his head. "I've never really wanted to have kids. Which drove my mother insane. But now? I still don't want to have abstract 'kids'. I want to have Noah. I want to play cars and give him baths and fight with him about eating vegetables and iPad time. I want to be his dad."

Tears are slowing trickling down Olivia's cheeks. She's overcome with emotion, never having dared to dream that she would find someone who

loved her son like she does. She uses her free hand to wipe the tears from her face as he continues.

"This is not a new feeling. This is not a result of some adrenaline high that's going to wear off. This is what I want.

You. Noah. Me. A family. I want to get a new place, one we pick out together. In a good school district, with a park nearby. If you wanna leave Manhattan that's fine with me, we'd probably get a bigger place, but it's up to you. It won't take me long to sell my condo, I get offers all the time. I want to build a life with you, and I want to do it now."

He's perched on the edge of the coffee table, directly in front where she's sitting on the couch. They're searching each other's eyes; Olivia is speechless. She knew he was serious about them, about Noah. She didn't know he was this serious. Didn't want to assume anything or rock the boat, so just let things be.

She doesn't know what to say, but he's just laid his heart out for her so she knows she has to do something.

She reaches her hand out and grasps his, tugging him up to stand, then wraps her arms around his waist. After a moment she says quietly in his ear, "Careful, Raf. With declarations like that, a girl might think she's about to get a marriage proposal."

Her stomach drops when he pulls away abruptly. She tries to backtrack, but she doesn't think she's making any sense, just babbling incoherently about getting hit in the head removing her filter.

Rafael doesn't go for the door, though. He's rummaging through his briefcase, and when he stands up he's holding something in his hand but she can't tell what it is.

She's still rooted in place in front of the couch, so he reaches out with his free hand and pulls her around the coffee table so they have room.

"I've been carrying this around for weeks. Trying to plan something perfect. Waiting for the right time. Fuck it."

He takes a deep breath, and still holding her hand, drops to one knee.

"Olivia Benson. You and Noah are everything good in my life, and I don't want to go another day without proving to you and to the world that you're my best friend, my soulmate, and that I love you. Will you marry me?"

The look in his eyes is what starts her tears again. So full of love, and hope. She can barely wrap her head around the fact that this man, this good and loving man, is offering her the world.

She's speechless again, and as the hope in his eyes starts to turn to doubt, she nods her head.

"Yes?" He questions, not wanting to assume anything.

She nods more fervently, unable to speak. He's still holding her hand, but flips open a vintage ring box with the other. All she registers about the ring is that it's shiny; she is just concentrated on his face. He's crying now, too, and she drops to her knees in front of him, falling into his arms.

"Yes," she finally whispers. "Yes, I will marry you. I love you, Rafael Barba."

He hugs her closer, savoring the moment and saying a quick prayer of thanks. She said yes.

They slowly pull back, then smile and share a gentle laugh. "You're a mess," he says, lovingly, wiping the tears from her cheeks as best as he can with only one hand- he's still clutching the ring box in the other.

She blushes slightly, then leans in and kisses him gently, using her thumbs to wipe his tears as well.

"I'm allowed. You see- the love of my life just asked me to marry him, I'm a little emotional."

He laughs then kisses her again, pulling away once he remembers the ring.

She whimpers when he pulls back, not expecting it to be over so soon. "C'mere, baby."

Unable to resist, he places soft kisses on her lips between his next words.

"Don't. You. Want. To. See. Your. Ring?"

He laughs when she pushes him away abruptly. "Ah! Yes. Here," she says, holding out her left hand.

He takes the ring out of the box with shaky fingers, and gently pushes it onto her finger.

"Oh, Rafi. It's so beautiful," she says, in awe of the simple beauty that adorns her finger.

"It was my Abuelita's, if it's not your style we can go shopping together-" he tries to explain but Olivia cuts him off with a lingering kiss.

"It's perfect," she whispers, tears falling again. "I know how much she means to you, I'm so honored that you would want me to have it, that I get to wear it."

"Everything, Liv. Everything I have is yours." He pulls her closer, wrapping her in his arms and burying his face in her hair. "Dios, te amo," he whispers, almost to himself.

end flashback

"What are you thinking about?" Rafael questions, linking their fingers together and smiling when he feels her new piece of jewelry.

"Today," she murmurs into his collarbone.

"Big day," he comments.

Liv looks up and makes eye contact with her fiancÃ©. "Big day. I could have lived without the events of earlier but I was mostly thinking about tonight." She smiles widely. "We're getting married."

He returns her smile. "We are." He lets go of her hand to shift her fully on top of him and leans up to catch her lips in a kiss.

"Now comes the fun part," Olivia says in a sing-song voice.

"What, planning a wedding?"

"No, my love. Though I'm sure we can make it bearable. I'm talking about sharing a closet."

Rafael snorts out a laugh, then replies, "I will alternate between two suits and four ties if it means we get to go to bed together every night."

"That might be the sweetest thing you've ever said to me," she says, eyes sparkling.

He smiles back at her for a long moment before his face falls. "It won't actually be necessary though, right? Liv?"

She's shaking with repressed laughter at the genuine fear in his voice. Finally getting herself under control she says, "I guess it just depends on the size of the closet in our new place."

End
file.